

could find absolutely no alternative. World War Two seemed to have left the ex-general with a indelible loathing of battle. Consistently during Eisenhower's two terms, the President avoided violent exchanges in favor of negotiated compromise. The only conflicts war ended were those belonging to soldiers killed on the field. International dilemmas were rarely resolved by fighting. When the prospect of hostilities arose Eisenhower insisted that every alternative to battle be exhausted before he accepted its necessity. That might mean anything from conferences to the threat of attack, but it did not imply actual hostilities. The President could find many alternatives short of war. In fact, during Eisenhower's eight years as president, he sent no American soldier into combat. Suez was no different. It was therefore because of both global and personal principles that Eisenhower sought to uphold the Tripartite Declaration.

On May 25, 1950 the United States, Great Britain, and France had signed the Tripartite Declaration pledging all three nations to work to avoid an arms race in the Middle East. More importantly, from the President's perspective, the proclamation took "this opportunity of declaring...deep interest and...desire to promote the establishment and maintenance of peace and stability in the area and unalterable opposition to the use of force or threat of force between any of the states in that area." In addition the document stated that if the signatory

governments discovered one country was preparing to attack another they would take actions "within and outside the United Nations, to prevent such violations."²³ It was due to this proclamation, and statements made during the Eisenhower's tenure rededicating America to peace in the Middle East, that the administration railed against the aggressive attacks against Egypt.

From one view point the British and French appeared to be upholding the doctrine by entering the foray when Israel attacked Egypt. Hostilities had broken out in the Middle East and they were taking actions "outside the United Nations to prevent such violations." Yet, within the UN, the French and British purposefully obstructed Security Council efforts to end the fighting. Besides this, the Eisenhower administration already suspected the deception being played out by its allies. Britain and France adhered to the precepts of the Tripartite Declaration in form, but not in substance. The United States could not be party to that aggression.

Knowing that the US could not participate in an attack on Nasser, the President asked the next logical question of his advisors. During an October 29 conference in the State Department, he reviewed the situation and then wondered how the United States could justify its support of Nasser.²⁴ The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur Radford voiced the answer Eisenhower already had decided upon.

Radford pointed out during the meeting "the matter must be handled on the basis of principle...." Eisenhower added "he did not fancy helping Egypt in the present circumstances but he felt our word must be made good."²⁵ Action was required and such efforts could not support England or France. Only by fulfilling the pledge made in the Tripartite Declaration could the United States retain its credibility around the world, and Eisenhower maintain his own peace-of-mind.²⁶

As the State Department meeting continued Eisenhower and his staff discussed their options. Although no final course was decided upon, one step would be taken. Using what amounted to a divide and conquer tactic, Eisenhower suggested a note be sent to Britain indicating America's intention to support Egypt. England could join the United States in condemning hostilities against Egypt - thus leaving France as the sole supporter of Israeli aggression and creating even greater political pressure to end the violence - or face the consequences. If the British backed Israel and France "they may open a deep rift between us...."²⁷ The implications of that split were left to the British imagination for the time. Eisenhower's blackmailing may have been subtle, but its intent was undoubtedly serious.

Although concerned about a "rift" forming between the United States and Great Britain caused by the British inclination to use force, the President could not forgo his ideals. Only days after Nasser

nationalized the Suez Canal, the Secretary of Treasury, George M. Humphrey, inquired about the results of such discord. Eisenhower admitted such disagreement would be serious, "but," he added, "not as serious as letting a war start and not trying to stop it."²⁸ A war that was avoidable was an inexcusable one.

On October 31, as Britain, France, and Israel attacked Egypt, Eisenhower delivered a speech condemning their aggression. Remaining faithful to his own principles of peaceful negotiation in lieu of violent altercation the President told America "In all the recent troubles in the Middle East, there have indeed been injuries suffered by all nations involved. But I do not believe that another instrument of injustice - war - is the remedy for these wrongs."²⁹ There is no doubt Eisenhower was sincere in this sentiment, publicly and behind closed doors.

Aggression solved no problems for the British and French, but served only to strengthen Nasser and his cause. Eisenhower complained that "If the British would agree to negotiate a settlement, then the opinion of the whole world would be against Egypt."³⁰ In that way, Britain and France could show that Nasser was unwilling to compromise. Only then might the allies have justification for action against him. As it stood, Nasser was the victim and Western Europe the villain. Eisenhower wanted his allies to consider the situation long enough to settle on a means of reversing those roles. Brute force did not

serve that purpose.

What also became clear to the President was that the Western aggression in the Middle East had provided Russia with a prime opportunity to increase its influence in that area. Besides the fear the Soviet Union would gain control over the Suez Canal, in evidence were the Cold War insecurities about Communist world domination. The allies' attack gave the Soviet Union the chance to denounce democracy and the West. It made for excellent material in the ongoing anti-democracy propaganda campaign. Russia actively sought ways to support the Arabs, while keeping the Western image tarnished. Considering this information, there is no question that Eisenhower's concern about the Soviet advance influenced his vehement rejection of unjustified aggression.

At the November first NSC conference already touched upon, Secretary Dulles raised the topic of the Soviet Union and the Middle East. He warned that if the United States did not take the initiative soon, the Soviet Union would seek an end to hostilities, and gain dominance in the Middle East.³¹ Dulles continued by recommending that the United States be sure to propose a resolution in the UN before the Soviet Union did so. Any other scenario gave Russia the propaganda advantage as well as made America a follower, instead of a leader. Also, a Soviet resolution was bound to label Britain and France as

aggressors.³² Although Eisenhower and Dulles might feel that way privately, publicly such tags gave the West a poor image. An American resolution would avoid the stigma of titles by calling for a universal cease-fire and UN peace-keeping forces.

To allow the Russians any say in the Middle East was to give them influence in that area. The US had to pass its resolution before their rivals could act. American UN representative Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., did so, and received rousing acclaim from countries around the world, for his effort.

On November 5 the situation in regards to the Soviet Union became even more complicated. That evening President Eisenhower received a note from Soviet Head of Government Nikolai A. Bulganin. Bulganin proposed a Russo-American military venture to bring the Middle Eastern combatants into line. The Russian official stated that the USSR was prepared to lend air support and naval power to the Egyptian cause, if the Western nations did not halt their onslaught.³³

To this partnership Eisenhower answered a definite no. Great Britain and France had circumvented American attempts at peace, yet despite this they remained the primary allies of the United States. America would not join with its chief rival in military operations against either country.

The Russians followed their offer to the US with threatening notes

sent to London and Paris. These communications carried an ominous Soviet warning. The Russians threatened to launch ballistic missiles at Britain and France if the two belligerents did not desist.³⁴

In the United States government, these warnings, although awful if fulfilled, were met generally with disbelief. Eisenhower, in his memoirs, recalled Chairman of the JCS Radford's reaction to the Soviet warning. The Admiral remarked, "It is very hard to figure out the Russian thinking in connection with their proposal. For them to attempt any operation in the Middle East would be extremely difficult, militarily. The only reasonable form of intervention would be long-range air strikes with nuclear weapons - which seems unlikely."³⁵ The Soviet's would not begin World War Three just for propaganda. In top government circles the threats were interpreted as bluffs.

Soviet intervention was largely discounted, since it was nearly impossible to accomplish. As a precaution and an American counter-warning to show the Soviets that the United States would not tolerate any aggression from them, Eisenhower mobilized US forces around the world. This action was a product of Eisenhower's cautious nature, not of fear that the USSR would actually follow through on its threats.³⁶ The President always kept open as many of his options as possible. World War Three was not likely to begin, but Eisenhower wanted to be prepared on the off chance something went horribly wrong. And, he was

prepared.

Charles Bohlen, Ambassador to the Soviet Union, informed the Eisenhower administration that the Russians had not intended the US to accept their offer, but had proposed the plan as a diversionary tactic. They wished to avoid drawing unwanted attention to events in the Soviet satellite country of Hungary.³⁷ As it turned out, because of the situation in the Middle East, the United States was for the most part preoccupied anyway. Although concerned with the situation in Hungary, America had few options open to it and mustered no more than weak public denunciations of Soviet actions.

On October 22 the people of Hungary revolted against their Stalinist rulers. For two weeks the situation appeared promising. President Eisenhower began his October 31 televised speech with comments about the country. He was optimistic that a new, free Hungary was coming of age. The Soviet Union had "declared its readiness to consider the withdrawal of Soviet 'advisors....'"³⁸ For a moment the threat of world Communist domination seemed to subside. The hope survived only another four days.

Soviet military forces attacked Hungary on November 4 crushing the rebellion and providing a horrific example for all other Eastern European freedom fighters.³⁹ The following day Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Robert D. Murphy, reiterated Ambassador

Bohlen's conclusion. He expressed the opinion that Soviet calls for a joint action by US and USSR in Egypt were designed to draw attention away from events in Hungary.⁴⁰ Bohlen's interpretation became the standard one.

The greatest difficulty resulting from the Soviet invasion of Hungary was not due to Russian actions, but to the previous attacks made by England, France, and Israel. Their joint efforts to regain control of the Suez Canal represented unjustifiable aggression. Russia's movements against Hungary fell into the same category. Both East and West were ignoring world opinion in order to obtain their objectives. How then, could the Western world condemn Soviet forces in Hungary and not appear hypocritical? Members of the Western community were committing immoral acts that appeared similar to Russia's atrocities. Moreover Britain and France had begun their aggression before the USSR had.

There was little the United States could do in Hungary. A propaganda bonanza was impossible given the circumstances since US resources already were diverted by the Suez Crisis and such a severe blitz would make America appear hypocritical, had one just as uncompromising not been directed toward the allies. Eisenhower also admitted that US intervention was an impossibility because troops could not reach Hungary without crossing neutral territory.⁴¹ All the President

could do was send America's forlorn hope: "The heart of America goes out to the people of Hungary...." - a nice sentiment, but ineffective.⁴²

Circumstances in Egypt did serve to divert attention away from Hungary. This gave the Soviets free reign in that area, without an American recourse. Instead of facing a tremendous propaganda campaign brought on by their attack, the Soviet Union received little criticism. What official rebuke that was offered came in the form of a United Nations resolution condemning their aggression, but offering no way to halt the destruction in Hungary.

In addition, the attack on Egypt by England and France mocked Western nations' traditional stance against taking such a course to settle disputes. The free world might expect Russia to brutally crush its opposition, but Great Britain and France were supposed to be "civilized." It was possible to conclude that Anglo-French aggression gave the Soviets an excuse to use force. All Russia needed to do was look across the continent at what its neighbors were doing. If England and France could commit immoral attacks, why not the USSR?

The Russian attack on Hungary fueled Eisenhower's desire to guarantee that Soviet influence remain at a minimum in the Middle East. On November 6, the same day Eden informed the President that Great Britain would abide by the cease-fire, Eisenhower sent a note to Eden. The American leader proposed three factors be included in the

United Nations cease-fire. First, there could be no conditions set on the UN cease-fire "so as to not give Egypt with Soviet backing an opportunity to quibble or start negotiations...[those] can be handled later." Second, the President stated that the peace-keeping force introduced into the Suez area should exclude troops from any of the big five nations - US, UK, USSR, France, and Peoples Republic of China. In this way "no excuse [would] be given for Soviet participation in UN force...." Third, the UN plan should be implemented as soon as possible to avoid further confusion and developments.⁴³ The President wanted to draw the crisis to a close and ensure Russia did not slip in before the gate was locked.

Eisenhower's effort to keep Soviet influence out of the Middle East was a main consideration in deciding what course to chose during the Suez Canal Crisis. Along with this motivation was his desire to honor the sovereignty of Egypt, maintain the efficiency of the canal, and remain true to all the principles involved. There have been, besides the explanations outlined here, several others offered for why Eisenhower reacted as he did. These theories propose less humanitarian - and less probable - motivations for America's adamant anti-aggression stance against England and France.

Herbert Parmet, author of Eisenhower and the American Crusades and Blanche Wiesen Cook, who wrote The Declassified Eisenhower, maintained that it was not principle, but election time worries that

caused Eisenhower to react with such anger. On the eve of the national vote England and France had launched an immoral attack. Not only did it reflect poorly on the image of the West, it also increased pressures and responsibilities for Eisenhower, who already was dealing with a hectic campaigning schedule. Parmet and Cook concluded Eisenhower took the attack as a personal insult and responded vindictively.⁴⁴

Blanche Cook added the questionable theory that Eisenhower sided with Nasser because "reliable sources" deemed the Egyptian leader "an agreeable business partner...."⁴⁵ Given Nasser's previous business dealings with the United States - the Aswan Dam and requested arms - even had businessmen informed Eisenhower of their sentiment, it seems improbable that Eisenhower or the State Department would agree with it. By all evidence collected, Nasser appeared to be a manipulative business associate, not a trustworthy one.

The most convincing of the arguments connecting the President's reaction and the national election came from Michael Guhin. Guhin put an intriguing twist on the theory that Eisenhower's reaction was related to the election. The author noted that given the close proximity of the upcoming election and the Middle East War, the President would be inclined to react in some way. "No comment" would have appeared as either acceptance of the Anglo-French position or as indecision. Neither gave the American people a good impression of Eisenhower.⁴⁶ Guhin

concluded that the President's response to the conflict was consistent with his interest in staying in office. The explanation avoided the image of Eisenhower as vengeful archetype. He was portrayed as a careful strategist in this model.

Although the above argument has a logical, persuasive line of reasoning to it - and is certainly well considered - the theory's validity, as with Cook's and Parmet's, is improbable. Eisenhower neither responded to the Suez Crisis out of spite because his campaign was interrupted, nor as a tactic to maintain a healthy image as the election approached. As accurately as can be determined, Eisenhower remained unconcerned with his reelection from the beginning of the crisis.

In fact, Eisenhower had revealed the lack of importance he placed on the election to himself and his advisors long before hostilities broke out in the Middle East. Writing in his diary on October 15, 1956 Eisenhower reviewed the situation as it stood then. He summarized the American belief that Israel had begun a military mobilization. Considering that the Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, might believe Eisenhower would not stand against Israeli aggression because of the Jewish vote in the United States, Eisenhower wrote the warning: "Ben Gurion should not make any grave mistakes based upon his belief that winning a domestic election [the presidency] is as important to us as preserving and protecting the interests of the United Nations and

other nations of the free world in that region."⁴⁷ If need be, Eisenhower had decided he would sacrifice himself to keep the peace.

Eisenhower's devotion to a cease-fire at the possible cost of his job was made apparent to some of his close advisors during a meeting in the White House on October 29. While contemplating the Israeli attack on Egypt and possible Anglo-French collusion with the Jewish State, Eisenhower's comments about whatever action the US took and his prospects for a second term were recorded. "The President said, in this matter, he does not care in the slightest whether he is re-elected or not. He feels we must make good on our word. He added that he does not really think the American people would throw him out in the midst of a situation like this, but if they did, so be it."⁴⁸ Eisenhower did not bother with the topic of elections, it was far outweighed by the importance of the Suez Crisis. And, in the end, he was returned to his office by a wide margin.

Finally, when Anthony Eden called Eisenhower on election day to announce that the United Kingdom would accept a UN cease-fire, Eden politely asked how the presidential election was going. Eisenhower's response was simply, "I don't give a darn about the election."⁴⁹ He was not concerned with the results of that political gambit. The President's thoughts remained focused on attaining peace in the Middle East.

Another explanation for Eisenhower's reaction to the British-

French-Israeli operation concerns the Anglo-French news blackout beginning in the second week of October. From October 15 - when an American reconnaissance aircraft recorded the existence of 60 Mystere planes in Israel, instead of the twelve officially there -Eisenhower wrote "we had the uneasy feeling that we were cut off from our allies."⁵⁰ The President's assessment was correct. The question that some ask is whether or not this intentional effort to keep information from the United States resulted in a deep resentment in American quarters.⁵¹

A comment made by Secretary of State Dulles during a National Security meeting discredits this theory. Speaking to the NSC members Dulles noted that Great Britain and France had acted contrary to US advice and also had ignored what was in their best interests. In spite of these facts, he added, "Of course, we should not let ourselves be swayed by resentment at the treatment the British and French have given us, or do anything except what we decide is the right thing to do."⁵² Here is a straight forward statement. Whether or not the US was angry with the Anglo-French actions, America should not react out of malice.

The final proof that Eisenhower's reaction represented what he believed morality called for, rather than spite, is found in his response to the implementation of the cease-fire. After Eisenhower received word on November 6 that Eden would accept the cease-fire, the President called his counter-part to say "I can't tell you how pleased we are that you

found it possible to accept the cease-fire....⁵³ It was a somewhat ironic statement since the US had forced Britain's acquiescence.⁵⁴

Eisenhower probably did not register the irony in his own statement. Most likely, he was genuinely pleased that the fighting was at an end. His actions after November 6 displayed no residual resentment about the events of Suez and he moved to erase all discord as quickly as possible.

Around quarter to nine the following morning Eisenhower received a phone call from Anthony Eden. During the course of the conversation Eden and Eisenhower agreed that Eden and French Prime Minister Mollet should visit the United States that Friday and Saturday - only two days away. The President commented, "after all, it is like a family spat." Eden agreed to inform Mollet of the plan and Eisenhower ensured him an invitation from America would be dispatched to Mollet immediately. At 9:10 one of Eden's aides called back to state that Mollet was delighted to accept and asked that all three governments announce the visit simultaneously - 11 a.m. in the Washington D.C., 4 p.m. in London, and 5 p.m. in Paris.⁵⁵ The President had made light of events in the Suez, so as to minimize the split that had recently occurred between Western Europe and the United States.

Eisenhower's plans were dampened, however, when he consulted with Dulles (still in the hospital), Herbert Hoover, Jr., and George

Humphrey. These three vetoed the idea of a meeting that weekend.⁵⁶

Definitely uncomfortable with his task, Eisenhower now had to rescind his invitation to the British and French.

Thirty-three minutes before Eisenhower was supposed to announce the visit, he called Eden to postpone it. He began directly by telling Eden the visit could not occur as planned. "I have just had a partial Cabinet meeting on this thing, & [sic] they think our timing is very, very bad...." The President proceeded to relay several reasons why his cabinet members had vetoed the meeting.

First off, he explained the United States had not prepared for what amounted to a summit conference. There remained much to study about the situation in Egypt - politically and militarily - before one could occur. Besides this the Democrats had won both houses of Congress the previous night and "I have to have the Senate and House leaders in right now. We have already issued invitation. They are to be here Friday and Saturday, and I have to be meeting with them."⁵⁷

Eisenhower's disappointment came through even in the transcript of his conversation. Even with logical explanations to support his argument, Eisenhower was distraught that the visit could not happen. He apologized to Eden saying "I do believe, in view of what my people say, we will have to postpone it a little bit. I am sorry....I am really sorry because, as I told you this morning, I want to talk with you [emphasis

original].” Eden tried to find out when would be a good time, but Eisenhower deferred, explaining that he needed to have a full Cabinet meeting before he could answer that question. Eventually, Eisenhower stated that he would call back in the evening with a time. The conversation ended there.⁵⁸ The President and his NATO allies eventually would meet, but it was not to be for some time yet.

On November 7 the Soviet Union offered to send Russian volunteers to reinforce Egyptian troops.⁵⁹ Dulles believed it was improbable the Russians would act on their threat, but that they hoped the offer would unbalance the situation in Egypt, and disturb the cease-fire. As far as the Secretary of State was concerned, what the Soviets wanted was a bigger hand in the cookie jar.⁶⁰ In the end, nothing came of the Russian declaration. Nasser refused their offer without hesitation.⁶¹ Undoubtedly the Egyptian leader opposed yet another foreign government peddling its doctrine in his land. Besides, Nasser had achieved his goals and therefore had no reason to continue the fight. The canal would be returned to Egypt and Nasser’s power among Arabs had increased. Despite Soviet efforts, the cease-fire held.

For all intents and purposes the crisis was over once the cease-fire went into effect. All that remained was clean up details. To the disappointment of the President events had run the course he most feared, but had originally anticipated. The French and British did not

exhaust all possible avenues before resorting to military action. Eisenhower saw no recourse but to force Britain and France to end their unjustifiable attack. Thus, Nasser was not dislodged, his power not diffused. The Western allies were cast as aggressors instead of saviors. Although America was hailed by smaller nations for its cease fire initiative in the UN, the price for such praise was a distorted image of the united Western front and the abhorrent implication that America had sided with the Communists. The Soviet Union was given the chance to play the role of White Knight to its utmost ability. The crisis ended in a victory for Nasser and a propaganda sensation for Russia.

From the beginning Eisenhower was aware of the potential dangers an attack on Nasser might bring. Four days after the nationalization he told his advisors "Nasser embodies the emotional demands of the people of the area for independence and for 'slapping down the white man.'⁶² Outright opposition to the Egyptian leader was sure to rouse antipathy from the rest of the Arab community. Unless the Suez situation could be defused without use of force, Nasser would gain and the allies lose. There was no justification for an assault and that was clear to everyone except those attacking.

The President steadfastly refused to accept war as the means of reversing nationalization. Supporting this allied response was not only immoral, it was counterproductive. America's credibility would suffer

along with a loss of respect from third world countries.

Once the violence began, Eisenhower did everything in his power to put a stop to it. He publicly denounced Britain's aggression and worked to empty the British treasury - in short, bringing the UK to the verge of bankruptcy to ensure their cooperation. When Eden could no longer sustain the attack, France had no choice but to halt also.

One thing must be clearly understood. United States pressure, not Russian threats, forced an end to the aggression. The Soviet offers of air force, navy, and troops may have seemed unnerving to the general public, but inside the White House, administration members did not harp on them. The Soviet Union would not risk annihilation in an effort to convert Egypt, especially considering that Nasser had spent the prior year playing the United States and Russia against one another.

The actions Eisenhower took were successful in ending the crisis. Conveniently, the ramifications of the administration's opposition to British, French, and Israeli hostilities were beneficial too. Michael Guhin provides an excellent explanation of the practical advantages resulting in Eisenhower's anti-aggression stance.

First, it allowed America to "counter any Soviet designs or threats over the Suez." By condemning the attacks on Egypt, the US remained in a position to work toward peace without joining Soviet efforts. This maintained the United States in good standing with the rest of the world,